

This is a Reviewed Article

What can we learn from the dark chapters in our history? Education about the Holocaust in Poland in a comparative perspective.

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Keywords:

Holocaust
education about the Holocaust
antisemitism
empirical studies

Abstract

The article investigates what research tells us about the dynamics of educational practice in both formal and informal education about the Holocaust. It poses questions such as whether it is possible to identify good practices on a political and/or educational level, whether there are links between education about the Holocaust and human rights education, and how education about the Holocaust relates to attitudes toward Jews. Examples of both international studies (such as those by the Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU and the American Jewish Committee) and some national surveys on education about the Holocaust are discussed, followed by an analysis of empirical studies from Poland based on focus group interviews and individual interviews with educators. The choice of case study was based on the historical fact that occupied Poland was the site of the murder of almost 5 million Jews, including 3 million Polish Jews.

In many cases a strong association with a Polish sense of victimhood based on the memory of the terror and the murder of almost 2 million ethnic Poles during WWII creates conflicting approaches and generates obstacles to providing education about Jewish victims. Nevertheless, following the fall of communism, the number of educational initiatives designed to teach and learn about the Shoah is steadily increasing. The article presents tips for successful programmes of education about the Holocaust which can be generalised for any type of quality education, but are primarily significant for education about tolerance and education aimed at reducing prejudice, counteracting negative stereotypes and preventing discrimination.

Introduction

Sybil Milton (2000: 14-15) wrote that "The Holocaust provides us with awareness that democratic institutions and values are not automatically sustained; and that the Holocaust occurred because individuals, organizations, and governments made a choice which legalised discrimination and permitted hatred and murder to occur". Contemporary education about the Holocaust should focus on historical facts, on individual victims if possible, and on the fragility of democracy, all of which seems obvious in the light of the above words. This article seeks answers to several questions which refer to potential relations between education about the Holocaust, education enhancing openness towards others, education to combat antisemitism and education about human rights, keeping in mind Sybil Milton's reflection on the constant effort needed to sustain democratic anti-discriminatory values. Are there links between these fields of education? What does research tell us about the dynamics of educational practice in both formal and informal education? Is it possible to point to good practice based on an evaluation of all these fields? The article does not refer to the links between education about the Holocaust and education on genocide prevention. Education against genocides is too wide a field to allow exploration within the page-frame of this text. Also, there is a general lack of studies evaluating the impact of education on genocide prevention as compared to education about the Holocaust, where studies on random samples and case studies can be described. First, selected examples of national and international studies on education about the Holocaust will be discussed, followed by an analysis of empirical studies from Poland.¹

Poland as a case study is chosen for several reasons. The number of Polish citizens of Jewish origin living in Poland in 1939 was around 3.5 million. Occupied Poland was the site of the murder of almost 5 million Jews, including 3 million Polish Jews. The Polish landscape is marked by the existence of the remains of concentration camps and by six death camps built by the Nazi Germans in occupied Poland: Kulmhof in Chełmno nad Nerem, Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka, Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek.

The number of Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust was about 250,000 (most of them in the Soviet Union, around 50,000 on Polish territory occupied by Germany) which indicates the enormous losses of the Jewish minority on Polish land during the Holocaust. While in Western Europe there was a widespread lack of acknowledgement and compensation for Jewish suffering after the war, in Eastern Europe Jews met with openly expressed anti-Jewish sentiment and often preferred not to reveal their identity. In Poland their life was often threatened. The post-war pogroms, along with the infamous behaviour of parts of Polish society towards Jews during the Holocaust, are shameful events. They are the darkest pages of Polish history, mostly forgotten for several generations. The waves of Jewish mass emigration driven by political antisemitism in the 1950s and 1960s, in particular that occurring in 1968, reduced the Jewish minority in Poland which is now estimated by various sources to be between 5,000 and 30,000. This small minority is not growing as in Germany, but is significant in the social and cultural sphere, and the phenomenon of the revival of Jewish culture in Poland, including among non-Jews, is remarkable and of worldwide note.

1 Parts of the paper were based on the research project: Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, "Attitudes toward Jews and the Holocaust among Polish Youth" which was conducted in 2008-2011 at the Centre for Holocaust Studies, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, supported by grants from the International Task Force for Holocaust Education Research (currently the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance), La Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah and the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

National and international studies

In their report on history, civic- and social science textbooks "The Holocaust as History and Human Rights: A Cross-National Analysis of Holocaust Education in Social Science Textbooks, 1970-2008" Patricia Bromley and Susan Garnett Russell (2010: 154) stated that

"(...) for several decades following the Second World War, there was a lack of public awareness and education about the Holocaust in North America and Europe (...) beginning in the 1970s the Holocaust emerged as a topic in school curricula in Western countries, primarily in the US, Canada, Germany, and the UK."

Only two states, Sweden and the United Kingdom, have conducted nationwide studies on education about the Holocaust and only a small amount of relevant research has been carried out in other countries, e.g. in Germany. I therefore commence the discussion with examples of cross-national research related to the dynamics of education about the Holocaust and human rights education.

The crucial ongoing debate on whether the Holocaust should be taught in historical or human rights terms was reflected in the longitudinal study of trends in Holocaust education conducted by Bromley and Russell (2010) which was based on 465 textbooks from 69 countries. The study revealed a general increase in discussions about the Holocaust in textbooks and a shift in the Holocaust discourse from being a matter of historical facts to considering it as a violation of human rights. In total, 25% of the overall sample discusses the Holocaust. Fewer textbooks (total 12%) speak about the Holocaust using human rights discourse, but a sharp increase was noticed in the proportion of books and countries that discuss the Holocaust specifically as a human rights violation. In Poland, however, education about the Holocaust is seldom embedded in the framework of human rights, despite the fact that the German foundation "Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft" (EVZ) (Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future) has been supporting projects attempting to connect education about human rights and learning from history.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the EU's independent expert body on fundamental rights, was also interested in the potential link between education about the Holocaust and human rights education. After completing the study commissioned in 2010, the FRA addressed the issue of the relationship between education about the Holocaust and human rights education publishing the reports Human rights education at Holocaust memorial sites across the European Union: An overview of practices and Excursion to the past – teaching for the future: Handbook for teachers² with examples of how memorial sites link the history of the Holocaust to human rights. The reports were intended to reach those ministries in European countries responsible for maintaining memorial sites and support institutions that preserve the memory of the Holocaust, as well as educators. The study gathered data using a mixture of methodologies, as is typical for anthropology, ethnography and social studies³ and examined educational practices at the Memorial and Educational Centre Hartheim Castle (Austria), Mémorial de la Shoah (France), Buchenwald Memorial Site (Germany), Memorial and Educational Site House of the Wannsee Conference (Germany), Anne Frank House (The Netherlands), State Museum at Majdanek (Poland), Living History Forum (Sweden), and UK Holocaust Centre (United Kingdom).

2 Discover the Past for the Future: A study on the role of historical sites and museums in Holocaust education and human rights education in the EU (2010); Excursion to the past – teaching for the future: Handbook for teachers (2011), European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Vienna.

3 Surveys, Focus Group Interviews, individual interviews, participant observation.

Among the FRA study findings, the most striking was the discrepancy between the frequent ministerial statements on links between education about the Holocaust and human rights education and financial support for visits to memorial sites including, in many instances, the lack of that support in practice. Thus, a common assumption about links between the two fields of education was in fact challenged. It turned out that memorial sites seldom include education about human rights in their pedagogical practice. Some institutions declared that other organizations are mandated to focus on human rights while they devote their attention to the Shoah. The link between education about the Holocaust and human rights education, obvious to politicians and educational policy makers, seems remote from the memorial site institutions' conceptualization and, with few exceptions, distant from their practice.

The link seems obvious to the observer, as the Holocaust was an enormous violation of human rights. One reason why the link between the Holocaust and human rights education was not made in practice the FRA study pointed out, relates to the content and structure of the education of future teachers. Facts about the Holocaust are taught predominantly by teachers of history who do not have enough training in the field of human rights. As for human rights, they are mostly taught within civic/citizenship education and/or within curricula on social studies or knowledge about society by teachers graduating in social or political studies who do not have a satisfactory training in history, particularly concerning the Holocaust. Courses related to the Holocaust are seldom present in higher education teacher training institutions. This situation in fact also applies for guides to museum and memorial sites. Their pre-service and in-service training predominantly relates to the history of the site's or the museum's exhibitions. A lack of facilities in which students could have additional seminars at the memorial sites after the visit, is yet another reason why (with some exceptions as for example in Anne Frank House in Amsterdam) the link between the two fields of education often remains rhetoric.

In 2011 the FRA and Yad Vashem, the Holocaust education and research centre established in 1953 by the Israeli Parliament, launched a Toolkit on the Holocaust and Human Rights Education in the EU: "an online practical guide inspiring educators who wish to develop teaching projects that link the Holocaust and the protection of human rights."⁴ The in-depth evaluation of the above projects identified in the FRA study and/or by Yad Vashem has not yet been conducted. One can note, however, analyses of educational initiatives by academics (including studies of informal, field education, such as trips by youth to former Nazi German concentration and deaths camps located in Germany and contemporary Poland), incorporating text analysis and a cultural memory framework. These include studies such as that of Kverndokk (2009) looking at the school-reports of Norwegian students or the implementation of national surveys in Israel in 2007-2009 (Cohen, 2013). Both authors, using different methodologies, deal with the power of young people to create meaning from the past. Kverndokk focuses on texts written by tenth grade students from Norway both before and after trips to former camps. The author pays attention to the tension between the students' expectations and experiences. One can learn from the article that Norwegian students are "exposed to trauma-drama" (p. 264) reading Anne Frank's diary and watching *Schindler's List* or *La Vita è Bella*. Are students aware of the betrayal of Anne Frank by her Dutch co-citizens? Is the film by [Roberto Benigni](#) informative about the Holocaust? Whether knowledge of the relationship between Norway and Nazi Germany is widespread among students and how they relate to this historical fact from their national past, remains, however, unknown to the reader.

⁴<http://194.30.15.238/fraWebsite/toolkit-holocaust-education/index.htm> [visited July 21, 2013].

Recent analyses by the author and Robert Szuchta revealed that Polish textbooks contain material covering historical facts related to the Holocaust and present information which is in accordance with recent academic work and historiography on the WWII. When it comes to the attitudes of Poles towards Jews during the German occupation, however, the representation of those facts is either skewed or omits the context of the Polish rescue of Jews.⁵ It would be desirable to assess the knowledge of European students not only with reference to the ghettos, deportations and camps but also to the Vichy regime, Antonescu, Quisling, [28th SS Volunteer Grenadier Division Wallonien](#), [Estonian Auxiliary Police Battalions](#), [Latvian Second SS Volunteer Brigade](#), [SS-Freiwilligen-Schützen-Division «Galizien»](#) and many others in their respective countries.

Surveys on attitudes towards the Holocaust have been carried out in some countries, but their methodologies differ and it is hard to see the overall picture. The impact of teaching about the Holocaust is, despite several attempts, difficult to assess due to a lack of standards on what level of knowledge should be considered satisfactory and according to Jack Jedwab (2009: 8), "...there have been relatively few efforts to measure the degree of knowledge about the Holocaust across various countries". One of the attempts to measure the impact of education about the Holocaust on the level of antisemitism was a study by Christopher A. Simon (2003) carried out among American university students in autumn 1999, which did not reveal significant differences between control and experimental groups (enrolled in a course on the history of the Holocaust) with regard to the level of anti-semitism. However, the assignments to groups were not random in this study and also the preliminary level of attitudes toward the Jews could have been positive in both groups. The fact that students attending a course related to the Holocaust were self-selected may have played a significant role.

An evaluation of several studies on Holocaust education in the primary, secondary and higher education sectors in the USA, noting two main bodies providing teacher education, the USHMM and Facing History And Ourselves (FHAO), was reported by Fallace (2009: 21). It brought mixed results leading to the important conclusion that Holocaust education should be examined within the context of the overall goals of education and not "as an end in itself". Fallace finalised his conclusion by stating that more research is needed on the long-term effects of learning about the Holocaust, an objective missing from many studies due to methodological obstacles and financial concerns (need to follow-up the target group, control variables affecting moral reasoning, reflective thinking and many other competences and skills).

Sweden, which initiated a national campaign in 1998 under the leadership of Prime Minister Göran Persson, is undoubtedly one of the leading states in the world in terms of Holocaust awareness. A crucial initiative aimed at increasing knowledge about the Holocaust among young people was followed in 2000 by the Stockholm International Forum on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research attended by a significant number of high level representatives from 50 countries. Sweden is one of the few countries where a government agency, the Living History Forum (LHF), conducts nationwide surveys. Several studies were generated by the assumption that Holocaust knowledge may affect attitudes toward diversity and raise awareness of contemporary genocides. Among them the LHF

5 Fragments of the analysis were presented in the paper of Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Robert Szuchta "The Gap between New Historiography and Education about the Holocaust in Poland and Elsewhere" during the conference "Autonomous Histories and Studies of the Holocaust" 3-5.11.2013 at the Wiener Library of the Tel Aviv University and the Bar Ilan University and are included in the article by Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs and Robert Szuchta "The intricacies of education about the Holocaust in Poland. Ten years after the Jedwabne debate, what can a Polish schoolchild learn about the Holocaust in the history classes?" submitted for publication to "Intercultural Education".

commissioned a survey of 10 000 teachers (5081 respondents) conducted by Anders Lange. The teachers surveyed in 2007 believed that education about the Holocaust is very important and is more effective in opening up moral issues for examination than other subjects. More than half of the respondents expressed the opinion that students are motivated to learn about the Holocaust and almost 80% of those surveyed reported a lack of "Holocaust fatigue" among their students (Fried 2009). The study revealed correlation between the teacher's level of education and their knowledge about the Holocaust, and, worryingly, showed a deficiency of training among the teachers surveyed. Large proportions of teachers believed that teaching about the Holocaust is crucial to everyone, not only for those in countries where the Shoah occurred and felt that, according to them, it increased students' understanding of the origins of hate crimes, racism and genocides

Sociologists explain that some forms of contemporary antisemitism, for example that revealed in Henrik Bachner and Jonas Ring's study on attitudes in Sweden published in 2006 "Antisemitiska Attityder och Föreställningar i Sverige", may result from not coming to terms with past history, namely with the dark sides of WWII history (Sadowski 2007). The research was funded and commissioned by the Living History Forum and the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. The data were gathered by means of a postal questionnaire sent out to 3,000 Swedes and showed that antisemitic views and ambivalent attitudes towards Jews are more common among Muslim Swedes than among Christian and non-religious Swedes. The study also revealed that anti-Muslim prejudice is far more prevalent than prejudice against Jews. The results of the research indicate that researchers have to be cautious while trying to explain the origins of attitudes in general. Also, media commentators should not draw too rapid conclusions when describing data.

National research conducted by the Institute of Education (IOE) in the UK found that more than 50% of teachers surveyed state that it is difficult to teach about the Holocaust and also that they were not aware of existing supportive institutions and resources (Salmons and Andrews 2010: 3). Paul Salmons (2003, cited in Jedwab, 2009: 12-13) "suggests that teaching the lessons of the Holocaust might inspire youth to work harder towards a fairer, more tolerant society that sees strength in diversity, values multiculturalism and combats racism."

A longitudinal study "Never Again! Does Holocaust Education Have an Effect on Pupils' Citizenship Values and Attitudes?" (Maitles, Cowan and Butler, 2006) was commissioned by the Scottish Government in 2006. Its main objective was to evaluate the impact of teaching about the Holocaust on student's values and attitudes relating to citizenship issues, particularly those concerning minorities and disadvantaged groups. The sample consisted of 238 upper primary students from three schools in one rural local authority near Glasgow in 2006 and cannot be generalized. The survey was carried out prior to and after lessons on the Holocaust to examine their immediate and long term effects. It revealed an improvement in values and attitudes immediately after the lesson on the Holocaust, an improvement which was also found ten months later, although the effect was not as strong. The study brought the following results: those students who studied the Holocaust tended to have more positive attitudes and values than those who didn't study it. The study in Scotland revealed that Holocaust education can contribute to human rights awareness. The study of Maitles, Cowan and Butler (2006), however, relied on self-perceived statements related to "knowing" such terms as antisemitism, racism, human rights or the Holocaust, not on the content of this knowledge, so it is impossible to find out what exactly students know. In addition, the primary school children in Scotland were asked for voting preferences, which may be considered inappropriate as it lies too far from the scope of their personal experience.

The case study of Poland

In Poland, a country with a still insignificant number of ethno-cultural minorities, the relationship between societal diversity and knowledge/awareness of the Holocaust has not yet been investigated. The attitudes of Polish teachers were given an in-depth evaluation by Magdalena Gross, a PhD student at Stanford University in 2010. The teachers had attended five of the annual "Teaching about the Holocaust" Summer Schools run for 50-60 teachers by the Center for Holocaust Studies at the Jagiellonian University in conjunction with American partners, and since 2008 with the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Educational Center and Yad Vashem. The results of her survey indicated that more than half of the responses to the question "Why is teaching the Holocaust important?" referred to "keeping memory alive," and "remembering the 'real' past", which was coded as Truth/Memory. In many teachers' eyes the history of the Holocaust was falsified in the past. Slightly fewer answers (49%) recalled the universal meaning of the Holocaust. One teacher indicated that "Teaching the Holocaust is part of individual and national memories...". Tensions between those memories may, however, occur. Sometimes the internalization of family memories and a desire to maintain a positive image of one's family may contradict official knowledge, as in the case of widespread compliance with National Socialist crimes in Germany (Welzer, H., Moller, S. and Tschuggnall, K. 2002 quoted in *Education on the Holocaust...* 2006: 150). According to Harald Welzer persecutors constructed a worldview where there was no place for the feeling of guilt. As a result of this strategy, a discrepancy emerged between official, public memory and family memories.

Since the teachers interviewed brought the term "memory", it is worth recalling that there is only one way to deal with the past and that is memory. People seek more intimate contact with the past through family histories, collective memory, local history and visiting museums, not through dominant representations of the past and those created by states (i.e. master narratives). Formal and non-formal education are crucial in shaping a political culture in which the social, collective memory of the past also has many functions, apart from informing about history and warning us that crimes and cruelty may be repeated.

Some researchers distinguish social memory from cultural memory. Jan Assmann (2008: 7) first separates personal memories from the social construction of memory (external memory symbols) to underline that "human memory brings about a synthesis of time and identity, both on the collective and the personal level, which may be called a diachronic identity." In Jan Assmann's model (2008: 7) "agents of transmission, teachers, artists, rabbis, scholars support cultural memory and pass it, in the form of texts, commemoration ceremonies, buildings and other manifestations, to future generations". The scope of this text does not allow, however, for issues of memory formation and identity among Polish students affected by awareness of the Holocaust to be covered. Also, it would be premature to draw any conclusions since the process of including the history of Jews into the local memory of cities, towns and villages started, with some notable exceptions, after the fall of communism and intensified after 2000.

At the International Forum on the Holocaust in January 2000, representatives of 46 countries (including the Polish president Aleksander Kwaśniewski and the prime ministers of Israel, France, Germany and Great Britain) signed a common declaration (known as the Stockholm Declaration) to strengthen the moral commitment to ensure that future generations can understand the causes of the Holocaust and reflect upon its consequences. The evaluation of the implementation of the political will of states and other agents of commemoration was not yet conducted. In 2000 the biggest debate east of Germany took place in Poland after the publication of Jan Tomasz Gross's book "Neighbors" (2000) about

the murder of Jews by ethnic Poles in Jedwabne and neighbouring Radziłów, Wizna, Wąsosz, Stawiska, and Szczuczyn. The publication of "Neighbors" (2000) on the massacre of Jews on July 10, 1941 revealed that the murder had happened when the Germans arrived on territory previously occupied by the Soviet army. The publication triggered the most intensive debate on the involvement of part of the Polish population in the Holocaust. The debate started in the media soon after the broadcasting in April 2000 of Agnieszka Arnold's documentary film "Where is my brother Cain?" on Polish TV.

The debate rubbed out the boundary between the German persecutors and the local ethnic Polish population (which was strongly engraved in the Polish consciousness). The case studies presented, however, deal mainly with the attitudes of students (survey) and teachers (interviews) and do not allow one to draw conclusions related to the content and process of formation of memory of the Holocaust in Poland. This topic is still taboo in many localities and would require a different methodological approach and a new study on a much larger scale.

The author's study presented below was of a quasi-experimental character – the survey questionnaire was filled in by students selected as a national sample as well as by students from classes where a specific educational stimulus was introduced, namely programmes concerning tolerance in general coupled with educational components covering Jewish culture and history. This group, within this quasi-experiment, made up the so-called "experimental group", while the national sample made up the control group.⁶

The survey questionnaire contained questions allowing a comparison to be made between the two groups concerning their level of knowledge regarding the Holocaust. In one of these, the young respondents were asked to define the word Holocaust. In accordance with the accepted hypotheses, the percentage of those who included the terms genocide, mass killings or murder of Jews in their definitions was much higher in the experimental group (59%) than in the control group (33%). A distinctly higher percentage of students from the experimental group was likewise able to indicate the total number of victims of the Holocaust. The answer "6 million" was chosen by 34% of the respondents from the experimental group, while only 14% of the control group surveyed made the same decision.

The percentage of respondents who believed that Poles helped the Jews during the war "as much as they could" rose by almost 6% between 1998 and 2008 indicating an increase of defensive responses. The percentage who believed that Poles "could have done more" (11%) and "did not help at all" (2%) did not change significantly (in 1998 the responses were 9% and 2% respectively). In total 7% fewer of those surveyed believed that Jews should not get special treatment and care because of their wartime losses and suffering (41% in 1998 compared to 34% in 2008). The number of hesitant answers increased – 52% of respondents chose the answer "Don't know" in 1998, and ten years later this rose to 60%. The percentage agreeing with the statement about special treatment for Jews due to their losses and suffering during the war decreased, but not significantly – from 7% to 5%.

The respondents were also asked to decide who constituted the largest group of victims at the Auschwitz camp. The students in the 2008 study most often chose the response: "it isn't important which group – they were simply people who died" (43%). Fewer students (38%) indicated Jews as the largest group, and 10% indicated that it had been Poles. The perception of Auschwitz as a universal symbol of genocide seems present in most analyses of the data.

6 The data analysis of the study of attitudes towards Jews and the Holocaust among Polish youth was performed by a team of analysts from the Social Research Section of the Academic Circle of Sociology Students of the Jagiellonian University, under the supervision of Dr. Szymon Czarnik. I would like to thank Mateusz Magierowski in particular for his analysis and reports.

Summary of findings from the individual interviews conducted in Poland⁷

The basis for this part of the text is a collection of 105 interviews with students from Polish secondary schools, teachers, NGO representatives, local leaders and workshop trainers.⁸ All respondents are either participants or organisers of extracurricular projects about the Holocaust and Jewish history or participate in or organise additional lectures on Jewish history and the Holocaust during regular school lessons.

It was most interesting to find out what motivates teachers to dedicate time and considerable effort to extracurricular projects about Jewish history and the Holocaust and to find out about good educational practice which could be replicated elsewhere. Of the teachers interviewed, 15 were involved in – and were the initiators of – complex, long-term extracurricular projects on Jewish history and the Holocaust. In 5 cases, the projects focused on the discovery of the Jewish past of their own city or town. Teachers from Kielce, Białystok and Bodzentyn visited places, buildings and monuments connected with the pre-war Jewish community in their locality and with the Holocaust, researched detailed information about these places and produced a film (Kielce), a website (Białystok) and their own version of a guided tour around their town (Bodzentyn). The use of local history as an initial point of interest generally played an important role in teaching about the Holocaust.

Another approach was oral history. One teacher from Białystok initiated a project to carry out interviews with two local residents who had been awarded the title "Righteous among the Nations" for having saved Jews during the Holocaust. After intensive preparation of the students (lectures about the historical background, work in archives, work with films and books), the interviews were published on the website of the Foundation KARTA and students presented their work during an event at the Nozyk Synagogue in Warsaw. A school from Szczekociny organized a long-term project called "Oral History", where students conducted interviews (audio tapes) with older village inhabitants remembering the multicultural pre-war past and the Holocaust.

Furthermore, another outstanding project worth mentioning was a theatre play produced by students from Białystok who researched the pre-war, wartime and post-war experiences of three Jewish Holocaust survivors from the region and developed a theatre scenario. The play "I don't want to remember. I can't forget" was presented in several places in the region and won an award in a contest of projects about the Holocaust in the Warsaw club "Mamele".

Smaller projects were e.g. an initiative to clean up local Jewish cemeteries (3 respondents) and the organization of exhibitions at schools and "Days of Remembrance". School lessons on Jewish cuisine, customs and dancing were run by 4 respondents.

The most frequently mentioned activities were those of the Grodzka Gate-Theatre NN organization in Lublin, especially their project "Letters to Henio" (6). There were 4 respondents that mentioned continuous and long-term cooperation with this organization. The project "To Bring Memory Back" implemented by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODZ) was part of the activities of 4 respondents. As this project is open to different approaches and ideas, the outcomes were very varied: an exhibition of artistic works of students, a model of the former Jewish district of Kielce, research on the ruins of a so-far not widely known former unit of Gross-Rosen concentration camp in the little village Gruszczyca.

⁷ This part of the text was co-authored with Elisabeth Büttner, PhD candidate at the Center for Holocaust Studies, Jagiellonian University.

⁸ Altogether, there are 61 interviews with students, 29 secondary school teachers, 13 representatives of NGOs, 1 expert and 1 priest who are locally involved in youth projects about the Holocaust.

Two respondents participated with their classes in a complex project for the organization of a Forum for Dialogue among Nations in Warsaw, which consisted of several meetings with trainers (meetings in the classroom, visits to places connected with the Jewish heritage of Warsaw together with interactive elements, students developing their own small projects).⁹ One respondent had borrowed art exhibitions from the Israeli Embassy in Poland and presented them at his school ("Landscapes in Israel" and "The wall of tears"). Regular visits to memorial sites were organized by 8 respondents. The money and distance factors are important here – if a school is far away from a former camp site, in many cases the teachers are unable to organise regular trips. Respondents working in schools in cities close to a concentration and/or death camp site like Oświęcim (Auschwitz), Warsaw (Treblinka) or Lublin (Majdanek) gave special emphasis to the necessity to regularly offer visits to these places. Such visits were partly obligatory, and partly voluntary. In total 7 interviewees organized youth exchanges, 6 of them with Israel and 1 with a Swedish school (teacher from Bodzentyn). The question of what to focus the programme on proved a controversial issue. Should it be just the Holocaust and war-period or also simple intercultural aspects, fun and contemporary youth interests (film, theatre, music, dance)?

One of the research questions was why do some teachers put a lot of effort and time – in most cases unpaid – into extracurricular activities and projects? And if they do so, why would they pick such a painful and difficult topic as the Holocaust and the remnants of Jewish life in contemporary Poland? The first and most often mentioned reason was the conviction that young Poles really should know something about the history of their own city and of their own country. And as Poles had lived with Jews as close neighbours for centuries, Jewish heritage and the Holocaust are an important part of Polish history:

These kinds of initiatives show to our students that our society does not only consist of Poles (...). I myself had lived in Lublin for many years, and nobody had made me aware of its history. I had heard about Majdanek...but I couldn't imagine that such a large number of people (Jews) had lived here (teacher from Lublin).

According to the respondents, local Jewish history, in particular, is largely unknown among young people. Knowing about history is called an "obligation", and teachers see themselves in the role of the person responsible to pass on knowledge about Jewish heritage and the Holocaust to the next generation:

We knew that the history of the Jews from Sobków had never been written down by anybody although Jews had been living here for many years. Therefore we thought that discovering this would be an interesting experience for our students (teacher from Sobków).

Local history and conditions also seem to play a role – teachers from schools which are close to a memorial site (Bełżec, Majdanek, Oświęcim) saw a specific obligation to educate their students about the local history of the Holocaust. A similar motive was expressed by a teacher from Bodzentyn, pointing out the necessity for Poles to also face painful aspects of the past:

If we have knowledge about an issue, we don't need to be afraid of it. Without knowledge, we are afraid. It is important to be open-minded, to talk. Knowledge is

⁹ Students worked in groups in the class room. In the case of questions, they could contact the trainers from the Forum for Dialogue Among Nations by email. Later the student projects were sent to the Forum, where they were evaluated, and the best projects were given awards.

most important. In order to be ready for the future, we need to know our past. No matter what it was like. We also must face painful and difficult moments.

Another point frequently mentioned in the interviews was personal interest in Jewish history and the Holocaust. Being convinced of the importance of possessing knowledge in this area, teachers were willing to sacrifice their free time for extracurricular projects:

I have always been interested in that issue. I am a historian. I was fascinated by the synagogues in Nowy Sącz and Tarnów, where my family lives. I guess my interest is connected to my personality, to my general curiosity – after all, they (Jews) had lived next to us (teacher from Kielce).

The goals of creating tolerance and understanding for other cultures and overcoming negative stereotypes and antisemitism were repeatedly mentioned as reasons for teachers' involvement in Holocaust-related projects:

I have always been interested in methods used to overcome stereotypes [...] when I started to get annoyed about the fact that our society is intolerant. I observed typical behaviour not only among the older generation – people who remember the war and might have reasons for having bad opinions about other nations – but also among young people. This is very irritating (teacher from Kielce).

One wanted to bring students' attention to the scale of the Jewish contribution to Polish history, art, literature and science. Asked about the goals of their additional activities, teachers mentioned the following points: to overcome negative stereotypes and build tolerance for others, to pass on knowledge about the multi-ethnic past of Poland as a state and of the region/town, to teach facts about Jewish culture and the Holocaust, to promote awareness and social activism. Motives of fear within society and/or specifically among students of talking about the Holocaust and the former local Jewish community were particularly remarked upon and appeared repeatedly. Such fear means that long lasting taboos still remain. This taboo about the past raised serious doubts, particularly with the growth of a new historiography, about what had happened on Polish soil, in the towns and villages and about how one's family and/or in-group had behaved when faced with mass murder? When asked about the doubts of students participating in a Polish-Israeli youth exchange, one respondent mentioned the fear of being confronted with the persecution and bad treatment of Jews by the local Polish population (respondent from Kielce, where a well-known pogrom occurred in 1946 in which Poles killed more than 40 Jews).

Before the fall of communism, the representation of the Holocaust, for example at memorial sites, concealed the Jewish victims which were listed as a nationality at the very end of the long list of other national victims. Local memories or local knowledge were often suppressed, in many cases due to uncomfortable feelings, guilt or shame and sometimes also fear because of acquiring Jewish real estate or goods during and after WWII and because of cognitive dissonance related to their own and/or own group's behaviour. This dissonance referred to the self-image of pious, noble, heroic and just Poles when their own behaviour was often incompatible with this view.

Only knowledge and awareness enable understanding and empathy for "the other" in society – this viewpoint was repeatedly cited throughout the interviews with teachers (overall 12 respondents). Knowledge and the ability to speak about common Polish-Jewish history without negative emotions and mutual offence are, in the view of the respondents, essential for the future of a democratic European society. Knowledge makes it possible for

students to not blindly follow the opinions (often stereotypical ones) of their parents or their environment, but to develop their own opinions and discuss them:

[I want to] sensitize them (the students).(…) To make them able to take their own actions. (I want) them to not be afraid to speak. (I want them) to not be afraid to take action. (I want them) to react every time to what happens in their environment. And – this is most important – I want them to draw conclusions (...) (teacher from Brzeszcze).

There were 3 respondents who explicitly highlighted the fact that it is not only anti-Jewish stereotypes which need to be overcome, but general hostility towards minorities.

Most respondents are working alone on their projects or with the help of a small number of colleagues (17 mentions out of 28). This is an important observation, as it shows the lack of general acknowledgment of the importance of teaching about the Holocaust and the lack of institutionalisation. Teachers asked about explanations for negative reactions to their projects in their own environment mentioned not antisemitism, but general fear in society. Talking publicly about the Holocaust – the Nazi mass murder of Jews, mainly committed on Polish soil with Poles being witnesses to Nazi atrocities on a daily basis or in some cases taking an active part in chasing and denouncing Jews – has just recently become more and more accepted in Polish society. Jan T. Gross' books "Neighbors" (2000/2001) and "Fear" (2006/2008)¹⁰ on antisemitic violence in Poland after World War II have paved the way for a more critical approach to the past and – at least partially – lifted the taboo about talking about complex Polish-Jewish relations. It is of note that it was mainly respondents (teachers and an NGO worker) from Kielce – where during an anti-Jewish pogrom in summer 1946 more than 40 Jewish Holocaust survivors fell victim to persecution and murder by Poles – who noted that fear is an important motive for the rather minor popularity of Holocaust related projects in schools. "Ignorance and fear" comments Bogdan Białek, President of the Jan Karski Association in Kielce, were the reason for hesitation and negative reactions to his initiatives to remember the Holocaust and teach about it in schools. There is a broad consensus among the NGO representatives interviewed that the main and essential precondition for cooperation is the interest, motivation and initiative of teachers.

The most frequent answer to the question why students took part in a project about the Holocaust was encouragement by a teacher, local priest or members of an NGO. Very often, teachers proposed a project in class and invited interested students to sign up and take part. Although this answer does not necessarily show the real motivation for participation, it is an important clue to how one should approach such projects. Furthermore, students indicated that by (often incidentally) having taken part in one event, they had been invited to continue their cooperation.

Another frequently given answer was "general interest in the topic" of Jewish culture and the Holocaust, and "curiosity to learn something new". Getting more information about Jewish culture and the will to broaden knowledge about the history of one's own town/region was also a motive which appeared frequently during the interviews. The motivation to restore lost memories and awareness about the past among the local population dominated:

In my opinion, these are very important and positive activities because we need to remember history and what happened, so that people don't forget about it. And [it is

¹⁰ Both books were published at different times in the United States and in Poland ; this fact was one argument in the immense public debates in Poland and abroad about Gross' theses about antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence in Poland after World War II.

important] that houses are not built on old Jewish cemeteries or that synagogues are not destroyed or transformed into storehouses etc. (student from Szczekociny).

General curiosity and a desire to experience and learn something new, wanting to meet new people and an interest in gaining new knowledge about the past of their own region were the motives most frequently mentioned during the interviews. Another aspect frequently addressed was the intention to overcome negative stereotypes, prejudices and to fight antisemitism by replacing half-truths and products of the imagination with facts and knowledge. Furthermore, the hope was expressed that teaching about the Holocaust (and taking part in such projects) would raise awareness of the Jewish history of many Polish towns and villages and make sure that the Holocaust would not be forgotten:

I didn't really know what the topic would be like because we haven't yet discussed contemporary history at school, we only do it in middle school. I didn't really know what to expect. A workshop; a walking tour? In general, I was very positive about all this, but I didn't expect anything in particular. I didn't know what to expect (student from Warsaw.)

When asked about the effects of having participated in a project about the Holocaust, several arguments were repeatedly mentioned by students. One aspect was new knowledge about history – especially local history, because most of the projects were focused on the fate of the local Jewish community and the traces and ruins left behind nowadays. In this context one student mentioned that he has

the impression that many students didn't have any idea what happened here – precisely here on our soil, the terrain we are living on – and the simple extent of events and tragedies which took place here, has impressed them deeply (student from Kielce).

The new knowledge students gained during their involvement in a project about the Holocaust could help to overcome negative stereotypes. One student from Bodzentyn reported that

many people here have the stereotype that the Jews have done wrong to the Poles in the past (...). And now, as they are learning more about Jewish culture, they are changing their attitudes. We are learning that this was a nation which suffered a lot and that, all things considered, they didn't harm Poland at all.

Apart from bare historical facts, students also highlighted the opportunity to learn more about foreign cultures. This answer corresponds with the general "interest in the world", which many students indicated as a reason for participating in extracurricular projects about Jewish memory and the Holocaust: "I am generally very interested in learning something new and I wanted to know more about Jewish culture (student from Bodzentyn)." Those respondents who were participating in a student exchange project (with Israel or Sweden) also mentioned that the opportunity to meet new people from different countries was a great achievement of the project.

Interviews were held with 23 students participating in a one-day trip to the former Jewish shtetl of Tykocin and to the memorial at the former death camp at Treblinka that took place on September 23, 2009. This trip was organized by the history teacher Robert Szuchta from the LXIV Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz High School in Warsaw and the interviews provided more information on the essential components for successful education about the Holocaust.

Participants were asked why specifically they wanted to see the memorial site at Treblinka. The following motivations were mentioned: "I wanted to see this place with my own eyes", interest in a history lesson "on the spot" instead of in the classroom, a feeling that it is important to be confronted with the Holocaust, conviction that the Holocaust is a very important issue – also and especially for Poles – and that a visit to a memorial site is helpful in understanding history, "to keep the memory of those who perished alive".

All respondents were asked about their expectations concerning the trip. A few students did not have precise expectations, the majority however pointed to one or a few issues of particular importance for them. An expectation that was frequently mentioned was to deepen historical knowledge about the Holocaust by visiting the Treblinka memorial site and having a history lesson at the authentic site where the mass murder was carried out: "I expect that this trip will be more valuable than reading articles or books on the issue. I am not necessarily speaking about the facts as such, but when talking, the teacher will show emotions, passion (...)."The students expect that the visit will enrich their educational experience with the presence of the affective dimension. Put very directly, emotional involvement of the teacher is also anticipated.

Another idea was to use the possibility of becoming aware of and understanding what really happened in Treblinka about 70 years ago and to draw conclusions from these events:

(I want to) learn more about these people, how they lived and what happened during WWII, what really happened to these people there. (I want to) learn more about this topic. Generally we know what happened there and that these people were murdered, but anyway (I would like to) understand and comprehend the scale of the phenomenon.

The wish to see the memorial site at Treblinka "with my own eyes", "to experience history" and to live through emotionally difficult moments during a direct confrontation with the Holocaust were also frequently mentioned:

We talked about this during one lesson. And (he spoke about) what happened later on, that people came and dug up the graves in order to look for treasures. Somehow I remember that very well. I had expected something completely different; I thought there would still be some buildings left. But it turned out that there is just a monument left and the forest, and that there is nothing left from all that, in a physical sense.

The lack of buildings in Treblinka, which had been expected perhaps due to earlier exposure to iconic presentations of Auschwitz-Birkenau, surprised the student and evoked the experience of emptiness. Lack of physical traces of the mass murder in the former death camps are challenging for educators who have to present facts related to the history of the camps using maps and archival documents. Robert Szuchta and other teachers effectively combine the presentation of the historical facts of an unprecedented mass murder with reflection and emotional involvement in order to achieve their educational goals. Students have time to be silent, if they need to. They are not disturbed and overwhelmed by data, but they are not left alone. The teacher is nearby, ready to assist them, answer their questions or just to be near them.

Conclusion

The overviews of literature on education about the Holocaust brought mixed results. Due to the differing methodological approaches used, it is almost impossible to compare selected aspects of different studies. Some studies have limited implications or are based on the wrong types of survey and questionnaires, i.e. knowledge is based on self-assessment. Some studies use telephone surveys and despite the fact that the sample is selected for age, gender, social status, education and other socio-demographic variables, they draw conclusions and they generalise findings based not on a random sample but on a random sample of respondents answering phone inquiries on a home phone line. Presenting the results of the studies may be, nevertheless, informative for teachers, evaluators and educational policy makers, even if it is impossible to directly compare the knowledge of teachers and/or students from different countries about the Holocaust.

Despite this, the author believes, that it is possible, to some extent, to generalise the results of the studies focused on education about the Holocaust on the basis of the more general quality of the education, particularly the education aimed at enhancing students' openness and awareness of prejudice, negative stereotyping and discrimination. One of the basic questions, essential for the practical application of the whole research project, is: What kind of projects work best? Which approaches, strategies and techniques are to be recommended to other teachers who want to teach about the Holocaust? An attempt to seek general guidelines is, however, limited by the specific historical context of the countries where education about the Holocaust takes place. To bring desirable results, this education should be contextualized and include the history of students' countries of origin in relation to attitudes toward the Holocaust. Otherwise, there is a danger of evoking a particular belief that the horror of the Holocaust happened "there". Confronting the history of one's country is essential for students to understand the significance of the Holocaust and the involvement of states and individuals in initiating discrimination of Jews, compliance with Nazi policies, persecutions or "simply" prolonging the war.

Aleida Assmann (2006) advocates replacing the term "memory" with the term "historical consciousness" as an antidote to conflicts of memory in a Europe becoming united. According to Assmann, consciousness of the suffering of ethnic groups other than one's own can create compatible memories, not excluded memories, and help to develop the goal of a "United States of Europe". Meanwhile, the discourse on suffering emerged "very much oriented on human rights and thus prone to non-historical argumentation" (Diner, 2007, 158) and the call for an *integrated* history (Diner 2007: 162) of separated historical narratives remains a postulate.

Those activities and projects involving optional and voluntary participation produced the best results and involved great enthusiasm and interest among the students. Almost all respondents (teachers and NGO representatives) agreed on the extraordinary importance of a thorough preparation of the students for a project. This usually includes lectures about the historical background and training in methods (for example, how to conduct interviews, how to analyse sources etc.), discussions about open questions, addressing possible obstacles and doubts among participants. Getting feedback on participants' impressions can improve the programme and modify elements according to students' needs. Paradoxically, addressing local, complex and complicated historical narratives, could allow an enhancing of the process of teaching/learning about the Holocaust. This effort, going beyond focusing exclusively on perpetrators-states and facing the history of one's own state or region, could open students to a confrontation with more universal issues of the fragility of democracy and individual responsibility. To recall Sybil Milton's (2000) words from the beginning of this text, teachers and students should be aware that states, institutions and individuals have

choices on whether to discriminate or not, to collaborate or not, to murder or not. A regional history of past atrocities, the compliance of in-groups such as the volunteering by citizens of some countries to join SS formations, has the potential to transform the history of the Holocaust from "their history" also to "our history".

Concerning extracurricular projects, teachers frequently mentioned the creation of a relaxed atmosphere where students were assured that they were not graded and controlled as a very important principle. The atmosphere should be as different as possible from the usual classroom context. Students need opportunities to discuss, exchange opinions and experiences and express doubts. Stimulating discussions about fundamental questions about morals, choices in difficult situations and human rights is an aspect frequently mentioned, especially as - in the opinion of the respondents - this is not an approach often used in Polish schools during ordinary classes.

Another factor that motivates students is to plan an event (either at school or even open to the public in a local museum or house of culture), where the results of the project can be presented to a larger audience. Some respondents had organized exhibitions of photos taken during the projects or artistic work or a theatre play. This public acknowledgment shows the students how much they were able to achieve and gives an additional push for further involvement in similar activities.

When it comes to techniques and methods for extracurricular projects, the activities that teachers consider to be best practice include field work (for example at a Jewish cemetery, former ghetto), creative and independent group work under the supervision of a teacher or trainer, interactive discussions and the exchange of opinions and viewpoints.

A very important trend is the clear preference for a personalised approach to history. Instead of showing statistics, talking about general numbers and pure facts, history (in this case – the Holocaust) is taught by focusing on individual life stories and fates. The project "Letters to Henio" by the Grodzka Gate - Theater NN in Lublin is just one example of this approach.

Projects which go beyond pure listening to a lecture or watching films are evaluated the most positively. In particular, interactive workshops with different elements (film excerpts, reading testimonies, visiting synagogues, memorial sites, cemeteries) and projects where students had a lot of their own creative work were given high scores in the evaluation. In some of the respondents' projects students conducted interviews with local Holocaust survivors and contemporary witnesses or created a "map of remembrance" describing the history of their town/village in the shadow of the Holocaust. An approach used by several teachers/organisations was to give students the task of preparing and conducting their own guided tour around their hometown. Concerning projects that relate more to Jewish traditions and culture, teachers for example recommended Jewish cooking courses or dance classes, activities where students could actively participate through taste, smell, hearing, and movement.

The main motivation of teachers is personal interest. Students are generally interested and open to any kind of project. Most students were encouraged by teachers or local NGO representatives to participate in extracurricular projects, therefore it is necessary to encourage teachers to initiate projects, to raise awareness, to sensitize Polish teachers to the issue and to provide materials and information. A major obstacle is the lack of funds for trips and extracurricular projects, especially if a school is not located close to a memorial site or a bigger city with an NGO involved in projects. Teachers and NGO representatives complain about too little time planned for Jewish history and the Holocaust in the national curricular framework and notice an immense need for more education about the Holocaust

among Polish students. So far, education about the Holocaust does not diminish defensive reactions to the facts brought into the open by the media which threaten the national identity of pious and heroic Poles. More studies are needed in other countries on the aims and outcomes envisaged for education about the Holocaust in order to answer the question whether the findings from Polish empirical research are applicable elsewhere.

Comparing data enables us to notice that the memory of Polish youth does not necessarily emphasise the memory of its own "community of memory", as advocated by Charles Maier in his reflection on "communities of memories" (1993, 2001), especially in the light of the distribution of answers related to the personal significance of memory of the Holocaust to young people. There is not sufficient evidence to say, however, that this memory is not "... divided along the lines of different historical experiences" like in the rest of Europe as Monique Eckmann (2010, 9) the Swiss researcher focusing on the Holocaust, intercultural, antiracist and human rights education has concluded. Different historical experience moulds collective memories for generations. It is well known already. Data from the current survey shows that some educational policy makers and educators do not have enough knowledge on how to address those divided memories. Monique Eckmann (2010, 9) suggests that "... we educators must share memories and listen to all the various stories. We have to build a complex, multi-perspective vision of the past based on a dialogue of memories between communities of remembrance, and we must mutually recognise victimhood and suffering, yet we must always refrain from any kind of denial."

What if the "other" community of memory is not present, as in the case of many towns and villages in Poland? Then the responsibility lies on one side, one "community of memory", to create a dialogue with the "virtual", absent community. Such a dialogue is created by the teachers of the experimental classes researched in the current study.

An interesting question, perhaps for another, bigger, comparative study, is whether the Polish national memory of the Holocaust is part of a cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust, if such a memory already exists. Levy and Sznajder put forward this point of view in their book "The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age" (2006) which emphasises its paradigmatic features and its attribution to raising a global awareness of human rights.

There is the attempt to bring back the memory of Jewish neighbours in European states, a process which started, for example in Poland, with the publications about Jewish culture which have been produced since the end of the eighties. This process has continued and includes the ongoing effort to restore monuments and destroyed cemeteries and to renovate synagogues. The number and scope of initiatives in Poland indicates that Polish civic institutions and individuals are intensifying their efforts to teach about the Holocaust to a greater extent than in the 1990s, but that they are still at the beginning of their task.

Despite existing conflicts of memory, or perhaps because of them, the avalanche of civic initiatives related to the history and culture of Polish Jews and to the memorialization of the Holocaust in post-communist Poland is an attempt of a part of Polish society to empathise with the other community of memory and to incorporate the memory of the Holocaust into the mainstream national collective memory as a component of collective identity. The question of whether it is also a way to deal with the feelings of collective responsibility, or even guilt, or whether it is an expression of mourning, would require separate, in-depth studies.

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